

Message Text

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15

ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO AMCONSUL HONG KONG IMMEDIATE

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S E C R E T SINGAPORE 5521

EXDIS

MILITARY HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

DEPT PLS PASS CINCPAC

HONG KONG FOR CINCPAC AND CINCPAC POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, PFOR, SN, US

SUBJ: P-3 FLIGHTS THROUGH SINGAPORE

REF: SINGAPORE 5152

1. QUESTION OF P-3 FLIGHTS FROM SINGAPORE WAS RAISED BY ADMIRAL WEISNER DURING MEETING WITH DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND DEFENCE MINISTER GOH KENG SWEE DECEMBER 7 (APPOINTMENT ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED WITH PM LEE KUAN YEW WAS CANCELLED DUE TO THE PM'S VISIT TO MALAYSIA FOR TALKS WITH DATUK HUSSEIN ONN). I FOLLOWED UP BY RECALLING MY CONVERSATION ON SUBJECT WITH PM LEE KUAN YEW LAST JUNE, AND SAID THAT WE HAD RECEIVED SOME FILL-IN FROM AUSTRALIANS CONCERNING PM'S DISCUSSIONS WITH AUSTRALIAN PM FRASER ON QUESTION OF P-3S. I THEN ASKED WHAT CURRENT THINKING WAS ON SINGAPORE SIDE ON ASPECTS SUCH AS TIMING, ETC.

2. DR. GOH STATED IN REPLY THAT "WE ARE WITH YOU IN PRINCIPLE", AND WENT ON TO SAY THAT THERE WERE NO POLICY PROBLEMS BUT "TECHNICAL PROBLEMS" HAD ARISEN WHICH REMAINED TO BE IRONED OUT. THESE, IT TRANSPIRED, INVOLVED (AGAIN*) THE ADDITIONAL COSTS OF THE COUNTERINSURGENCY COURSE WHICH HAD BEEN TACKED ON

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IN WASHINGTON SUBSEQUENT TO THE CROWE MISSION AND THE INITIAL

US-GOS UNDERSTANDING WHICH HAD BEEN WORKED OUT COVERING THESE COSTS. DR. GOH WENT ON TO EXPRESS APPRECIATION FOR WHAT I AS AMBASSADOR WAS DOING TO HELP OFFSET COSTS OF THIS NATURE, BUT IMPLIED THAT MORE NEEDED TO BE DONE.

3. DR. GOH CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT PM LEE KUAN YEW WAS PLANNING A VISIT TO WASHINGTON NEXT YEAR AFTER THE NEW ADMINISTRATION HAD SETTLED DOWN, AND WOULD BE DISCUSSING THE P-3 QUESTION THEN.

4. COMMENT: FROM DR. GOH'S REMARKS IT LOOKS VERY MUCH AS IF NOTHING FURTHER CAN BE EXPECTED FROM SINGAPORE ON P-3 FLIGHTS UNTIL PM LEE VISITS WASHINGTON NEXT YEAR. AS WE HAVE HEARD FROM OTHER SOURCES, THIS VISIT IS PRESENTLY SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE IN MARCH. AS INDICATED IN REFTTEL, A MAJOR AREA OF CONCERN FOR LEE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE THE LIGHT IN WHICH THE U.S. INDIAN OCEAN PRESENCE IS REGARDED BY THE NEXT ADMINISTRATION, INCLUDING SINGAPORE'S ROLE IN PROVIDING STAGING FACILITIES FOR P-3 SURVEILLANCE FLIGHTS. EQUALLY IMPORTANT WILL BE HIS ASSESSMENT OF THE DEGREE OF US INTEREST IN EA AND SEA, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH US FORCES WILL CONTINUE TO REMAIN DEPLOYED IN THE REGION.

5. FROM DR. GOH'S CONSTANT HARPING ON COSTS OF THE COUNTER-INSURGENCY COURSE, ANOTHER ELEMENT IN PM LEE'S TALKS IN WASHINGTON COULD EMERGE (ASSUMING ALL POLITICAL QUESTIONS ARE RESOLVED): HE MAY IN EFFECT ATTACH A PRICE TAG TO SINGAPORE'S HELP ON P-3S WHICH MIGHT TAKE THE FORM OF REQUEST FOR COST REDUCTIONS ON GOS PURCHASES OF US MILITARY EQUIPMENT. ALTHOUGH SINGAPORE'S FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES ARE COMPARATIVELY LARGE, THE GOS DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT IS NOW MOVING INTO AN ERA IN WHICH LARGE-SCALE ACQUISITIONS OF SOPHISTICATED - AND EXPENSIVE - WEAPONRY ARE EITHER UNDER WAY OR PROJECTED (E.G. UH-1HS, F-5ES, C-130S, AND PERHAPS HAWK MISSILES), AND DEFENSE BUDGETS WILL CONSEQUENTLY BE TIGHTLY STRETCHED. SINGAPORE MAY THUS CALL ON US TO EASE THE BURDEN BY SELLING MILITARY EQUIPMENT AT CONCESSIONAL PRICES. OUR BARGAIN-BASEMENT SALE OF THE TWO C-130S IS A CASE IN POINT. IN THIS RESPECT, LEE MAY BE WATCHING CLOSELY THE PRICE WHICH THE FILIPINOS ARE TRYING TO CHARGE FOR CONTINUED USE OF PHILIPPINE BASES.

6. IN ANY EVENT, IT IS VERY EVIDENT THAT THE SUDDEN (AND
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RETROACTIVE) PRICE INCREASES WE ATTACHED TO THE COUNTERINSURGENCY AND OTHER TRAINING COURSES ARE STILL RANKLING HERE, AND MAY BE USED AS JUSTIFICATION FOR REQUESTING CONCESSIONAL PRICES FOR THEIR MILITARY EQUIPMENT NEEDS. HOLDRIDGE

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED CINCPAC.

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